

HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 5: The Early Daoists – Hermits, Shen Dao, and Laozi

Section 1: Early Daoist history: Great Dao Monism

- We generally start to talk about Daoism with various hermits mentioned in the *Analects*
 - Proto-daoists, linked in spirit and theme
 - Critical of Confucius' involvement in politics
 - Critical of society and of any social involvement
 - Anti-complexity - advocate a return to nature
- One version of this *Primitivist* urge is from the agriculturalists
 - No division of labor
 - Similar to primitive communists
 - Emphasis on the natural primitive state of humans
- Primitivists are not egoists like 楊朱 Yang Zhu
 - Primitivists reject names of roles and social statuses
- First theoretical Daoist: Shen Dào 慎到
 - Focused on unifying all natural kinds
 - 天 *tiān*^{nature:sky} can cover everything and 地 *dì*^{earth} can support it
 - 大道 *dà dào*^{great dao} embraces everything
 - Nobody needs to use language or distinctions
- Shen Dào “abandoned knowledge and discarded self”
- All below are from **Zhuangzi Chapter 33**:
 - “He flowed with the inevitable and was indifferent to natural kinds”
 - “He said “know to not know.” He would have reduced know-how to something harmful”

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- “He lived together with 是 *shì*^{this} and 非 *fēi*^{not-that}”
- “If he was pushed he went, if pulled he followed--like a leaf whirling in the stream, like a feather in a wind, like dust on a millstone”
- “Natural kinds that lack knowledge are free from the trouble of creating a self and from the entanglements of knowing what to do”
- “In motion or rest he did not miss the natural tendencies”
- “So he said, “reach for being like things without knowledge of what to do. Don't use worthies and sages. Even a clod of earth cannot miss the *dào*^{guide}.”
- 大道 *dà dào*^{great dao} is the sum of all the performance 道 *dào*^{guides}
- 大道 *dà dào*^{great dao} is history of the actual world from the beginning of time to the end
- Modern Chinese for knowledge is 知道 *zhī*^{know} *dào*
- Following 大道 *dà dào*^{great dao} comes easily – anything you do counts
- Shen Dào even rejects Yang Zhu's egoism: abandons ‘self’ as a guiding identity
 - If you relax and let yourself flow, you will naturally follow 大道 *dà dào*^{great dao}
- 大道 *dà dào*^{great dao} is actual space-time reality
 - It doesn't matter which *dào* you choose, there is one past and one future, the 大道 *dà dào*^{great}
dao